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ABSTRACT

In an effort to increase the application of "transfer of learning" (a phenomenon of connecting experiences encountered during an adventure activity to future situations) in the field of adventure education, workshops were presented at the 1984 Association for Experiential Education Conference at Lake Junalaska, North Carolina and the 1984 National Council on Outdoor Education Conference in Frederick, Maryland. The workshops focused on the need to implement various transfer models in actual field settings and shared current transfer practices and techniques that were successfully being used. A cumulation of responses from these workshops resulted in the identification of 11 methods for increasing the transfer of learning in adventure education. They were: including significant others in the learning process; placing more learning responsibility with students/clients in the program when possible; extending the program into the student/client's home environment; providing follow-up experiences for the student; providing natural consequences for learning experiences; teaching skills relevant and applicable for future learning experiences; including past alumni; teaching students/clients to transfer skills learned; encouraging use of reflection after learning; creating conditions for transfer before activities; and developing techniques that facilitate transfer of learning to occur. Examples of how to implement these methods and how organizations use these techniques are presented. A bibliography concludes the paper. (ERB)

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STRENGTHENING ADVENTURE EDUCATION BY INCREASING THE TRANSFER OF LEARNING

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ABSTRACT

TI: **Strengthening Adventure Education by Increasing the Transfer of Learning**

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The transfer of learning from adventure-based activites to future experiences for the participant has often been viewed as one of the most valuable components of the adventure education process. From material presented at the 1984 Association for Experiential Education Conference at Lake Junalaska, North Carolina, and the 1984 National Council on Outdoor Education Conference (AAHPERD) in Fredrick, Maryland, and the imput of workshop participants, the author identified eleven methods of increasing the transfer of learning in adventure education. The eleven methods discussed are:

1. The inclusion of significant others in the learning process
2. When possible, place more responsibility for learning in the program with the students/clients
3. Extend the program into the student's/client's 'home' environment
4. Provide follow-up experiences for the student
5. Provide natural consequences for learning experiences whenever possible
6. Teach skills that will be relevant and readily applicable for the student's future learning experiences
7. The inclusion of past successful alumni in programs
8. Use part of the program to teach students/clients to transfer the skills learned
9. Encourage the use of reflection after learning or "action" experiences in the program
10. Create conditions for transfer before the course/program/learning activities actually begin
11. Develop focused processing techniques that facilitate the transfer of learning to occur

Examples of how these eleven methods of transfer can be implemented is presented along with the identification of certain organizations that use these techniques for transfer. A bibliography is also included.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Through a number of mediums and with a variety of populations, the use of adventure activities have proven themselves to provide positive educational experiences for a variety of individuals. Much of the value of the learning associated with these adventure activities has been the effect they have on future learning experiences for the participant. This phenomenon of connecting experiences encountered during the adventure activity to future situations is known as the transfer of learning or, more simply stated, "transfer." While a wide variety of professionals in the literature (Rhoades, 1972) (Kesseleim, 1974) (Richardson, 1978) (Bacon, 1983) (Gass, 1985) and institutions that support the educational use of adventure experiences (U.S. Department of Justice, 1981) have stated the need to focus on transfer techniques to strengthen the field of adventure education, the actual implementation of transfer in the field often remains unorganized, disjointed or even neglected.

PROCEDURE

In order to increase the actual application of tranfer models, techniques and methods in the field, workshops were presented at the 1984 Association for Experiential Education (AEE) Conference in Lake Junalaska, North Carolina, on October 5th and the 1984 National Council on Outdoor Education Conference (AAHPERD) in Fredrick, Maryland, on October 19th. The focus of these workshops was to state the need to implement various transfer models in actual field settings and share current transfer practices and techniques that are successfully being used in the field.

At these workshops, participants were asked to join together in small groups and discuss what methods, techniques and/or activities they used to increase the transfer of learning from their program's activities to their students'/clients' future. During these discussions, a recorder was asked to write down the comments

from each participant. The transcripts from these group discussions and the material presented at these two workshops provided the following results.

RESULTS

The following responses are comments from a variety of members attending the workshop. The responses are written to provide the reader with ideas and strategies on how to increase the transfer of learning in their programs. When possible, the individual or organization that mentioned the specific method of transfer in a group discussion is noted. It is hoped that if further interest develops from these techniques, future avenues of investigation on a variety of transfer techniques will be available to the reader through these sources.

METHODS OF INCREASING THE TRANSFER OF LEARNING

1. **The inclusion of significant others in the learning process**. Many programs stated that by including individuals closely associated with the student/client, the transfer of learning was heightened. For example, the Eckerd Foundation incorporates peers, parents, counselors, social workers and teachers at various times throughout their year-round wilderness residential therapy program. This is done in order to strengthen the adolescent's future ties with these significant others. With most of their programs with adolescents in trouble, the Hurricane Island Outward Bound School (HIOBS) emphasizes close work with the troubled student's family in order for them to adjust to and support the student's changes in personality and behavior.

These programs and others at this AEE workshop mentioned the incorporation of pre-trip meetings with the family before the course even starts. These meetings illustrate to both the students and their families the reasons for their participation and also the possible changes in the student that could occur. Wilderness Challenge mentioned using personal, family and school goal setting as part of

their pre-course meetings with the student. These goal contracts, monitored monthly with an ongoing adjustment process, have been found to assist in the transfer of learning when the student returns from the wilderness portion of the program.

The Joy Resident Educational Center, a program for inner city youth that incorporates outdoor and adventure education into their school setting, involves the teachers in their students' experiential education programs. The premise of this involvement is to enable the teachers to support, reinforce and to try and use the observable changes in the outdoor program with the students in the classroom.

2. **When possible, place more responsibility for learning in the program with the students/clients**. Many individuals at the workshop stressed the importance of involving the students in the planning and operations of the learning experience. Numerous programs involve their students in the planning of menus, trips and future learning experiences. At the Rochester Alternative School in New Hampshire, after passing a performance test and working as an assistant for a period of time, students help run ropes courses for other organizations as part of their community service projects. At Pine Ridge, a residential program for individuals with learning disabilities, the focus on students learning and developing living skills is done to get them to develop a sense of responsibility for themselves and others. In building this sense of responsibility, the program has found that students develop a better awareness of themselves, their weaknesses and how to overcome/deal with them, and how to work on building their own personal strengths.

3. **Extend the program into the student's/client's 'home' environment**. Many workshop participants stated the large amount of their program's success when they were completed in their participant's 'home' environment. Whether this meant the inclusion of the students' families in the program, running the last part of a year-round wilderness program in a public classroom, or similar techniques, the

incorporation of the environment that the student will be living in at the end of a course has been found to assist in the transfer of the goals and aims of many programs.

4. **Provide follow-up experiences for the student**. Workshop participants felt that this technique was the primary method for insuring the transfer from one learning experience to another. Some of the transfer methods using follow-up mentioned at the workshop were:

a) Follow-up letters written by the participants to themselves mailed or given to them at a later date.

b) Follow-up letters written by the instructors to the students. The North Carolina Outward Bound School (NCOBS) mentioned that they mailed these letters to their participants six months after the course.

c) Schedule different time spans for follow-up activities (both short term and long term) depending upon the needs of the student/client and the goals of the program.

d) Make follow-up experiences constant and focused.

5. **Provide natural consequences for learning experiences whenever possible**. The Breckenridge Outdoor Education Center, a program that uses the wilderness to work with people that are disabled, stated in the workshop that using natural consequences for learning with their students has increased the amount of transfer for their programs. To further describe this point, the following excerpt is presented from the paper distributed at the workshop:

> "Superficially viewing the field of outdoor adventure education, one would think that all learning taking place in the outdoors would have natural consequences. Unfortunately, far too often this is not the case. Whether it has been from an 'overly' caring instructor or an overpowering one, too often the student becomes dependent on, is shielded by or anticipates the instructor as a reinforcer of learning. Once the course is over and the reinforcer (i.e. the instructor) is removed from the student, learning behavior is severely hampered or terminated. In this way, with artificial consequences the result of learning, transfer is extremely limited."

6. **Teach skills that will be relevant and readily applicable for the student's future learning experiences**. As stated by several participants at the workshop, skills taught in programs that have strong applicability to future experiences have greater potential to be transferred. The Katimavik Service Learning Program from Canada mentioned the emphasizing of generic problem solving and decision making skills for their students. This general approach was found to be successful in developing skills in students for future use.

7. **The inclusion of past successful alumni in programs**. Some programs mentioned the incorporation of successful alumni on courses or in programs. By listening to how these alumni used the skills they had learned from the program in their lives, students began to envision how they might use elements of the program in future situations. While not always advisable or possible for some programs, many individuals felt this 'vicarious' method of planning future transfer strategies aided in the transfer of learning for students.

8. **Use part of the program to teach students/clients to transfer the skills learned**. Some individuals felt the best way to increase the transfer of learning from their programs was to provide students with opportunities to practice transfer while still in the program. One interesting example of this presented at the workshop was the "Lifeskills Class" in the Wilderness Challenge Program. In this "class" during the program, students investigate such areas as problem solving abilities, peer and family relationships, decision making skills and an optional parents skills session.

9. **Encourage the use of reflection after learning or "action" experiences in the program**. Many participants at the workshop seemed to feel that the use of reflection after experiential activities aided in the transfer of that learning to future situations. One example of an element that heightened reflection mentioned quite often by individuals attending the workshop was the "solo" experience. When asked why they included a solo as an element in their program,

the North Carolina Outward Bound School (NCOBS) stated the following two reasons:

a) It reinforced the learning that occurred during the experience.
b) It helped the students/clients to identify how they were going to use the experience in the future.

10. **Create conditions for transfer before the course/program/learning activities actually begin**. Many individuals cited several steps that can be done prior to the learning experience that will aid in the transfer of learning from that activity. Some of the examples provided were:

a) Identify, develop or establish a commitment to change in the student.
b) Have the student set goals for the experience.
c) Write and set tight learning objectives for the student in the program.
d) Place the plans and goals made by the student in writing to create a stronger commitment for transferring the learning.

11. **Develop focused processing techniques that facilitate the transfer of learning to occur**. It was stated at the workshop that certain techniques in processing/debriefing/facilitating/evaluating experiential learning activities lead to a more positive transfer of learning than others. Some examples expressed at the workshop were:

a) Project Wild, a freshman wilderness orientation program at Duke University designed to increase self awareness and ease the adjustment to college for incoming freshmen, emphasized their use of processing activities that focused on the transfer to school and the various roles they would find themselves in at the University.
b) Inner Quest mentioned the need to debrief throughout their course, not just at the end of it. This allowed their students to continually focus on the learning that had taken place and how they could utilize this learning in the future. The program at Gordon College also stated their use of a discussion "follow-up" after each day on the course.
c) Several people felt that when using processing techniques, one should link the experiences from the present and future environments together.
d) The "role-playing" of certain future situations was mentioned as a viable technique by some individuals at the workshop.
e) The dealing with feelings, not ignoring or "discounting" them was expressed as a valuable concept for any debriefing technique.

CONCLUSIONS

Not all of these methods of transfer will work for all adventure education programs. The techniques presented here need to be implemented based on the appropriateness of the technique to a particular goal or program.

Even if the presented methods do not appropriately fit every program, it is hoped that the reader understands the need to implement stronger transfer models and techniques in the field of adventure education. The following thoughts stated at the workshop are presented as a postscript to focus the reader on this need.

> "As educators who use the outdoors and challenging situations to help students to learn more efficiently, we all aspire to teach our students something useable; and therein lies the value of our programs. But, unless we assist our students in providing their own linkages, bridges, and connections to their learning, the utility of much of the education we care and work so hard to bring about is put away in the equipment room along with the ropes and backpacks. As we strive to become better educators and proponents of the value of adventure education, let us look upon transfer as a device to excite students by showing them the future value of their current learning experiences. This motivation, provided by the opportunity to use their learning again, can furnish one of the strongest incentives for our students' continued learning and the field's success."

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